

2015 Art History Symposium, Art Department, Sacramento State  
*Here as Everywhere:  
Art of the Sixties and Seventies in Northern California*

Saturday, April 11, 1-5 p.m.

**Symposium theme:**

*Here as Everywhere* considers Northern California as an epicenter for the defining energies coming out of the Civil Rights movements and the end of modernist formal and ideological hegemony. New demographics, new inter-connectivity and new populist, inclusive content and form characterized the art of the region in the sixties and seventies just as it characterized cosmopolitan art everywhere in those decades. The Bay Area became the nexus of an expanding network of artists affiliated with private colleges like the California College of Arts and Crafts, the San Francisco Art Institute, and the young art departments of California's massive and inclusive higher education system, like UC Berkeley and Davis. Artist professors from far flung places and the swelling numbers of women, brown and black artists transformed graduate faculties and made production "here" part of historically significant production "everywhere."

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**Keynote speaker:**

**Michael Schwager**  
**Gallery Director and Professor of Art History**  
**Sonoma State University**  
**Sonoma, CA**

***Don't Hide the Madness: Bay Area Art in the 1950s and 60s***

Schwager argues that the work and sensibility of the Beat (and related) artists in San Francisco during the 1950s formed the foundation for much (but not all) of Bay Area art in the following decades. Among the artists discussed are Paul Beattie, Bruce and Jean Conner, Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, Les Kerr, Hayward King, Harold Paris, Deborah Remington, David Simpson, Clay Spohn, Bruce Nauman, Peter Voulkos, and William T. Wiley.

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**Paper presenters (alphabetical by author)**

**Makeda Best**  
**Assistant Professor, Visual Studies**  
**California College of the Arts**  
**Oakland, CA**

## *Radicalizing the Artistic – Production Models, Techniques, and Forms of the Political Poster in the 1960s and 1970s*

During the 1960s and 1970s, political poster workshops that emerged at Bay Area colleges and universities such as San Francisco State, the California College of Art, and the University of California, Berkeley, made vital contributions to the Bay Area movements for causes including anti-war and free speech. The history of these workshops, and the workshops and collectives inspired by them, illustrates a unique fluidity within the Bay Area print community of this era. This paper considers the distinct aesthetic choices and techniques of posters by artists who sought to “radicalize” the “artistic.” Rather than embracing the aesthetic of the spontaneous, these artists turned to formats including silkscreen. First, by borrowing motifs from canonical art works and references to global struggles, these artists developed a global visual identity for local struggles. Second, through the “workshop” model, the radical intention of the imagery was duplicated in a production model that embraced the role of higher education as social institutions and social practices as pedagogy.

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Bridget Gilman Lecturer in Art History  
Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA University of California, Davis, CA

### Urban Transformation and Aesthetic Experimentation: Responses to Gentrification in 1970s San Francisco

The San Francisco landscape underwent dramatic shifts in the 1970s. The long-awaited Bay Area Rapid Transit system connected the city and outlying suburbs, international finance housed in skyscrapers came to dominate downtown, and urban renewal efforts to redevelop the South of Market area (SoMA) displaced the existing elderly, low-income population. Clashes and compromises ensued; when the dust settled the city had new developments like the Moscone Convention Center, but such architectural growth also disbanded communities, raised rents, and increased ties between corporate capital and the real estate market. Against this background of block busting, protests, and gentrification, a number of San Francisco artists responded to the changing city landscape with innovative visual strategies.

This paper will examine two diverse case studies—Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan’s billboard project, and Janet Delaney’s South of Market photographs—in order to reflect on the dialogue between urban transformation and aesthetic experimentation. Mandel and Sultan began their collaboration in 1973, installing artworks for temporary exhibition in spaces traditionally reserved for commercial signage. The resulting billboards are both absurd and politicized—a formative instance of Conceptual art as commentary on capital and industry in urban locales. Delaney’s

work documents the impact of SoMA's gentrification; her color photographs are at once dynamic street documents and records of housing rights activism. The series draws on the allure of Kodachrome to communicate troubling spatial realities—an unexpected combination of

"Stephen Shore meets Studs Terkel." Both bodies of work reflect changes in artistic practice nurtured in Bay Area artistic communities and responsive to the region's economic and demographic transformations. They are also essential historical documents in understanding current tech-industry led gentrification, which, once again, is altering San Francisco's urban fabric.

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Nicolas G. Rosenthal Associate Professor of History Loyola Marymount University  
Los Angeles, CA

### Painting a Cultural Resurgence: California Indian Artists in the 1960s and 1970s

Among its many uses, art has long functioned politically for Native American peoples. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, when American Indian populations were at historic lows, art emerged as a forum through which Native peoples could preserve their cultural traditions. Even as they faced tremendous pressures to assimilate into American society, Native American artists defiantly painted scenes of dances, ceremonies, and other traditional activities for a growing patronage that included private collectors, museums, New Deal art projects, and government institutions.

Following the Second World War, these artists began to experiment with new styles and became increasingly interested in commenting on both the historical treatment of American Indians and their contemporary issues. By the 1960s, new institutions and a growing public interest in American Indians provided unprecedented opportunities to address prominent perceptions about Native peoples, take control of what was meant by "Indian art," and simply make a living as artists.

Much of what we know about this history of Native American art and the experiences of Native American artists focuses on New Mexico and Oklahoma. My paper, titled, "Painting a Cultural Resurgence: California Indian Artists in the 1960s and 1970s," identifies Northern California as an understudied yet crucial site for the growth of Native American art. It will locate Northern California within this context of a national movement by Native American artists through a discussion of those who lived and worked in Northern California, including Fritz Scholder, Carl Gorman, Frank Day, Frank LaPena, and Harry Fonseca.

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Matthew Weseley Independent Scholar New York City, NY  
Robert Colescott's Search for Identity

When Robert Colescott returned to Oakland, California, where he was born, in 1970, after living elsewhere for almost two decades, he began to address in his art an issue that remained unresolved since his youth: his racial identity. In paintings that appropriated the racist imagery of pre-World War II popular culture, he interrogated his own "acculturation," according to his friend, the artist Carlos Villa. In these paintings, Colescott satirized the demeaning images of blacks that he encountered as a child in movies, comic strips, literature and works of art. Colescott characterized his paintings of the 1970s as "messages from myself to myself," in which he reckoned with the cultural forces that demoralized and oppressed him as a child.

The internal dialogue Colescott described might also be characterized as a conversation between his past and present selves: the child and young man who was affected by images that posited a racial hierarchy, and the adult who sought to break the power of those images. The pervasiveness of racism in popular culture, combined with a lack of positive role models in his school curriculum, created for Colescott "my own personal conflict as to how do I identify myself and how to be proud of my identity and heritage." His predicament was not unique. "The worst crime the white man has committed," Malcolm X remarked, "has been to teach us to hate ourselves," and it was the progress and raised consciousness brought about by the Civil Rights Movement that inspired Colescott to create paintings that helped him cope with his own internalized racism. While these paintings are political in the sense that they are a response to the bigotry endemic to American culture in the 20th century, they don't express an unambiguous political or moral perspective, so they are sometimes misunderstood. These works were intended as personal self-expression rather than political statements, and for Colescott, making them was a way of "confronting his own demons," as art historian Lowery S. Sims has put it.

